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SHALL THE BIBLE CONSTITUTE THE ONLY SOURCE OF INSTRUCTION IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL?

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The mission of the Sunday school must determine its ideals and its methods. It is not easy to define that mission in terms that will differentiate the Sunday school from all secular schools. For example, suppose the mission of the Sunday school be stated to be the development of life in harmony with Christian principles. Properly understood the religious or Christian life, in order to be symmetrical, intelligent, individually pure, and socially effective, certainly needs instruction in many subjects that could not be taken up in a Sunday school. Does not all knowledge, rightly used, contribute to the character and efficiency of its possessor? No Christian today in business, in politics, or in the professions of law, medicine, teaching, and literature owes his effectiveness exclusively to what is popularly called religious instruction. Everything the Christian learns is of service in the development of his capacities, ministers to his larger usefulness as a citizen or in his vocation.

Humanity's welfare is not promoted solely by what is technically known as religion. The labors of statesmen, physicians, scientists, organizers of trade and commerce, educators, are vital elements in the improvements of life's conditions, in the possibilities of mental and moral development. All work that advances human interests in any way, national as well as spiritual, is work in harmony with God's will and therefore must receive his blessing and under the law of cause and effect it must produce beneficent results.

But although all these things are true, it is a self-evident impossibility, even if it were desirable, for the Sunday school to teach all subjects. There is a point of contact, however, between all knowledge and physical resources every man possesses and the mission of the Sunday school. That point of contact is the moral or spiritual experience of every soul, no matter what his vocation, his mental

equipment, or his financial resources. It is impossible to conceive this spiritual life except in terms of relationship to individuals and groups, to Nature, and to God. The chief weakness, it seems to me, of a great deal of religious instruction is the tendency to abstract the soul from the body and from outside relationship. Obedience to God is only possible by the discharge of duties to others, the right living in relationships. That can only be achieved by the right use of all our powers, our knowledge, and our resources.

The more I reflect upon the mission of the Sunday school the more I am convinced that its power for good, its place in the society of the future, and its grip upon the confidence and affection of coming generations is and will be determined almost entirely by its ability to cultivate the social spirit and to train boys and girls for social efficiency. There are thousands of men and women who have been trained in Sunday schools who possess numerous virtues of an individual character. In a sense they are negatively good. They refrain from vices that are harmful to individuals and to society. To that degree they are socially useful, for all virtue has some social value. But they lack a positive social spirit. By their indifference to social obligations they are a drag upon reform movements. They help to increase that social inertia which impedes progress.

Then there is another class of people, also trained in Sunday schools, many of them active members of churches and zealous in the promotion of certain kinds of religion, whose social ideals and conduct are aggressively hostile to the welfare of society. They pursue their personal political and commercial interests without regard to social obligations. They are trying to serve God and mammon.

Every advocate of progressive social-welfare work in politics or industry is constantly meeting with open or secret opposition on the part of men whose knowledge of the Bible is up to the average at least and whose zeal for church and Sunday school is beyond reproach. I might give numerous instances of concrete cases in verification of these statements, but it is hardly necessary as no one acquainted with actual conditions will dispute them.

The question, then, of the fitness of the Bible or of any other literature for use in the Sunday school depends, it seems to me, upon the type of character the Sunday school should aim to produce. In

other words, what is the kind of morality desired, since it is self-evident that there are many kinds? Is it stationary or progressive morality? Is it individual or social morality?

If the desired morality is progressive and social, can such a morality be properly cultivated by the exclusive use of the Bible, or should other literature be employed supplementing and interpreting the Bible?

Now let us first consider the fitness of the Bible to influence human life in the direction indicated. It can hardly be disputed that there are numerous types of morality expressed not only in biblical characters but also in biblical teachings. The good and the bad, the mechanical and the vital, the legalistic and the spiritual, the individualistic and the social, lie side by side in the same literature. To discriminate between these grades and types, between inadequate and lofty moral ideas, requires bold and free criticism in accordance with some standard. But this process of inquiry, comparison, and discrimination is most profitable intellectually and morally. It acquaints the scholar with the fact too often ignored that revelation and morality are progressive. It shows that moral conduct is the natural expression of moral ideas involving conceptions of God, nature, man, and duty. A study so conducted cultivates the mind and constitutes one factor in the development of moral character.

To study the Bible in this way requires the use of various modern books that set forth the biblical history of morals and religion in its true light. One reason for a widespread lack of interest in the Old Testament is that it is meaningless to the average person except in spots. My observation is that classes of scholars, ranging from fourteen up to adult years, trying to work up an interest in the Old Testament without this interpretative literature dealing with historical and literary problems, are suddenly seized with a lively interest when the biblical material is presented by means of these modern books.

Now I have said that the criticism and valuation of Old Testament morality have to be carried on according to some standard. I believe that standard is embodied fundamentally in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. Although in many respects as a whole the New Testament is more readily understood by the modern mind, yet it, too, needs the interpretative aid of modern books which help the

scholar to distinguish between the temporary and the permanent elements of the New Testament.

The fundamental principles of the highest types of modern morality are exemplified in Christ's life and clearly taught in his message. His morality was progressive and social in its very essence. But the history of morality conclusively proves that great progress has been made in the interpretation and application of the elementary principles of the gospel.

And this brings us to what seems to me the most fundamental need of the modern Sunday school. The church and the Sunday school have exceptional facilities for training the young in the work of furthering the interests of Christ's kingdom. To perform this task it is absolutely necessary to show the relationship and application of true Christianity to modern needs and conditions. All sorts of antiquated ideas about Christ and his gospel impede the spread of true social and progressive morality. The antidote for these misconceptions of the inner spirit of the gospel is a knowledge of modern ideas of science in its relations to the practical problems of individual and social morality. The baneful effects of unrestrained mysticism, theosophy, allegorical interpretations of Scripture, and unscientific views of Nature in relation to God are to be seen in every community. The effort to save souls without regard to social conditions, the individualistic piety that spurns the secular duties of a wicked world, the ecclesiastical struggles against liberal education and the secular schools, the inability to see the righteousness and beauty of natural laws, or the moral value of secular activities in politics and industry, all these are the fruit of limiting God's revelation to the Bible or to the church and of a narrow interpretation of true religion.

As a matter of fact we cannot obey the principles of the gospel without seeking the aid of human experience and particularly modern knowledge as embodied in science, psychology, and sociology. Disease, poverty, ignorance, and crime present numerous problems that have to be studied on their merits irrespective of any of the fixed biblical ideas concerning social ills. In various particulars the Bible will help us because it is a record of great experiences and the key, so far as principles and spirit are concerned, is to be found in the life and teaching of Jesus. But the older scholars in the Sunday school

all reach a point where they begin to face the call of the modern world to service. They have been taught from childhood the principles of Christianity. Thousands of them have accepted Jesus as their Savior. They are trying to follow him. But now in increasing numbers they ask: "What are we to do? What is the world's need?" In school and college, through books and periodicals, they have become acquainted with the social problem in its many forms and feel the stirring within of that mighty passion to do something really worth while.

The Sunday school will lose these young men and women as it has already lost their fathers and mothers unless we are prepared to carry their Christian education beyond the mere repetition of Bible stories. At this point books on social problems, biographies of notable men who have embodied the spirit of Christ, poems that breathe a modern gospel will be found to be a fresh incentive to study in the Sunday school. The time has come for us to recognize the fact that our God is not the deceased author of ancient books. He is a living God making sacred history now. He is inspiring men and women as truly as in ancient days. It is as true now as it was then that we are to do God's will, but if we try to discover what God wills without the aid of modern knowledge we will fail to be of real service to the present world.

In proof of the growing desire for broader conceptions of the whole problem of religion I may cite the popular interest in books and magazine articles that deal with live religious issues and problems in church work. Editors of magazines are supposed to know what interests the average reader. One can hardly find a secular popular periodical that does not contain some striking article on the church and social problems, various phases of religious methods of treating the sick, the question of immortality, and other religious matters. The Sunday-school teacher should relate the teaching of the Bible to these present-day popular interests.

Another evidence of the need mentioned is the return to the Sunday school of men and women when classes in applied Christianity are started for the purpose of considering the ethical phases of industrial, political, and social-welfare problems. In my own city five of the downtown churches, Unitarian, Methodist, Presbyterian, Congre-

gational, and Baptist, have organized such classes. The object of these classes is not primarily Bible study in the old sense but the study of Christian principles in their application to social questions.

Each class has its programme of topics and speakers. The addresses deal with the issues involved in the problems. There is no attempt to confine the discussion to the Bible but on the contrary a serious effort is made to understand the conditions of modern life, it being assumed that mature Christian people ought to have at least a general knowledge of the broad principles of Christianity. The result is that hundreds of men and women remain after church service to hear the addresses. In one class alone the attendance rarely falls below one hundred and fifty and is often about three hundred. The city in various ways has felt the influence of these discussions and numerous movements for good have originated in these classes or been furthered by their support.

From what has been said it is clear that the work of the Sunday school is evangelistic and educational. Its aim in dealing with the children is primarily evangelistic in the sense that the first need of the child is the development of its moral life into a conscious acceptance of Jesus Christ and a dedication of its will to the service of the kingdom.

Of course the educational phase of this evangelism is not to be ignored because the child's future conception of the meaning of the term Christian will depend largely upon early training. But conversion is a legitimate and primary aim of this religious education.

After conversion the primary aim is not evangelism but Christian culture. Too often that is lost sight of because the teaching still is carried on as if the scholar had not already devoted himself to Christ. With the development of his religious life there comes a desire for a larger and clearer conception of the whole problem of religion. Then naturally the course of study should not only include elementary instruction in social problems, but some attention should be given to the historical and literary problems of the Bible in order that the religious life may not be hampered in its interests and effectiveness by ideas of the Bible and of religion that will conflict with modern thought and modern interests. The ineffectiveness of many Christians, their indifference to the social demands upon them, and often

their determined opposition to broader church activities are due in almost every case to erroneous views of the Bible and theology. The inertia of many Christians is at bottom theological.

It is saddening and astonishing to see how many Christians who have studied the Bible all their lives have not the slightest knowledge of how the Bible came to be or any conception of the varieties of religious doctrines in the Bible itself.

As an instance of the cultivation of a state of mind unfavorable to effective Christian work in the modern world take the following: A "professor" in a religious school of the revival type recently taught an audience of at least fifteen hundred people that the devil had power over the winds and waves to destroy life and property. I have reason to know that he was generally believed. When one inquires into the causes for many of the cults that harass the church in these days he must be impressed by the fact that there is still a widespread hostility to science as materialistic growing out of all sorts of crude theological views of nature. I have come to believe more and more that it is not so much a mere general teaching of literature and ethics that is needed to supplement biblical instruction, but it is instruction in some of the elementary principles of science as they bear upon the problem of God and Nature, and upon the practical concerns of religion as related to our whole so-called secular life. The opposition to the scientific study of the Bible partly arises from a distrust of the term scientific and an ignorance of the scientific methods and principles.

These misconceptions manifest themselves also in indifference or opposition to various modern scientific methods of extending the kingdom of God through social betterment. Scientific methods of ministering to the poor and attempts to improve environments are scoffed at by many Christians because their minds are warped by literal conceptions of the Bible, by unsound views of the soul and the body, and by out-worn theological dogmas.

I do not see how we are to better such conditions except by supplementing the use of the Bible with other books and instruction that will aim at more than a mere acquaintance with a revelation supposed to be final and fixed for all time.